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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Proposed Brownlee Timber Sale and Other Activities Within the Sheep Gulch Roadless Area, Payette National Forest, Washington County, Idaho

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA Forest Service is proposing these activities for the Brownlee Subwatershed: harvest and regeneration of timber, changing the timing of grazing and combining the West Pine/Brownlee and Limestone Allotments, and prescribed fire to reduce fuels and enhance plant growth and mountain quail habitat.

The agency gives notice of the environment analysis and decision-making process so that interested and affected people know how they may anticipate and contribute to the final decision. The agency invites written comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis and the issues to address.

DATES: Comments must be received by June 18, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to David Alexander, Forest Supervisor, Payette National Forest, P.O. Box 1026, McCall, Idaho 83638.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposed action should be directed to Dautis Pearson, NEPA Coordinator, phone (208) 253-0134; or John Baglien, District Ranger, phone (208) 549-4201.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The USDA Forest Service is proposing projects within the 45,011 acre Brownlee Subwatershed. About 4-6 MMBF of timber from 600-800 acres will be harvested by thinning and regeneration methods, using tractor, skyline, and helicopter logging systems. About 300-400 acres will be regenerated. No road construction is planned for the timber

sale, which lies partially within the Sheep Gulch Roadless Area, Washington County, Idaho.

This proposal follows direction in the Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Proposals for the range allotments include changes in timing of grazing and combining the West Pine/Brownlee and Limestone Allotments. The number of days for grazing and the number of AUMs would remain the same for these allotments.

Fire management activities would focus on reduction of fuels following timber harvest and reintroduction of fire into the ecosystem. Piling with burning and underburning of logged areas would reduce existing and created fuels, preparing some of these areas for planting. Fire would be reintroduced into vegetation communities that burn frequently (every 10 to 50 years) under natural disturbance regimes. Prescribed fire activities would occur on a total of about 4,000 acres of open ponderosa pine stands, aspen communities, and grass/shrublands to enhance plant growth and diversity.

Preliminary issues identified are roadless area quality, forest health in stringer habitat, and the economic and resource effects of longer return intervals into the subwatershed.

Initial scoping began in October, 1997. The Forest Service is conducting preliminary analysis and will be seeking additional information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies and other individuals or organizations who may be interested or affected by the proposed projects. Additional input will help identify key issues and develop alternatives in preparation of the draft EIS.

The scoping process includes:

1. Identification of potential issues.
2. Identification of issues to be analyzed in depth.
3. Elimination of insignificant issues or those which have been covered by a relevant previous environmental process.
4. Exploration of additional alternatives based on the issues identified during scoping.
5. Identification of potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

The Forest Service expects to file the draft EIS with the Environmental Protection Agency and have it available for public review by July 1, 1999. The comment period on the draft EIS will be

45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency's notice of availability appears in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of DEISs must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts the agency to the reviewer's positions and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Power Corp. v. NRDC* 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Also, courts may waive or dismiss environmental objections that could be raised at the DEIS stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement (FEIS). *City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016 1022 (9th Cir. 1986), and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 45 day comment period so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the FEIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues raised by the proposed action, comments should be as specific as possible. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

The Responsible Official is David F. Alexander, Forest Supervisor, Payette National Forest.

Dated: April 28, 1999.

Carol Feider,

Operations Branch Chief.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Economic Research Service

Notice of Intent To Seek Approval to Collect Information

AGENCY: Economic Research Service, USDA.